
From Africa to Otterbein

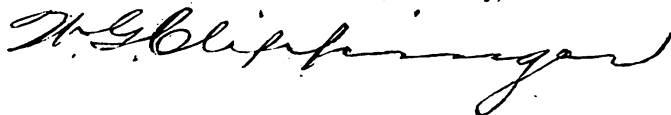


SYLVESTER BRODERICK

Introduction

The subject of this sketch has been a student of Otterbein for two years. He is a graduate of Albert Academy and has been a teacher in our mission schools in Sierra Leone. He is an industrious student and is a fine illustration of the good work of our missions in foreign fields. I take great pleasure in recommending him to pastors, and officers of churches, Sunday Schools and Christian Endeavor Societies who may want their people to hear the story of the development of a life from primitive conditions to a state of highest Christian experience. His book is filled with interest from beginning to end.

Very sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "W. G. Bliffinger". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name "President".

President.

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BEGINNINGS

Over twenty years ago, there was born into the home of a humble family a fat chubby baby. If it had been an American baby, its mother would have been proud to find that it weighed about 12 pounds; but in Africa mothers don't weigh their babies and it would have been an unheard of thing for me to have been weighed. All that I know now about my weight then is I was above the ordinary size of African babies.

Long after my arrival I grew fatter and fatter and from that time to this there has been some tradition about my having been unusually fat. One day, mother told me long ago, I was left in the care of one of my older sisters while she was looking after the washing. My sister either got too tired to look after me or I was giving her too much trouble and slipped away from me. I, noticing I was alone seized advantage of this liberty and started to crawl around on the floor. I straightway went to the washing apartment while mother was out in the yard hanging up the clothes and without any noise took a box of bluing that she had left open and started to chew. I had a good bit in my mouth and my face was all smeared with it when mother came in. In her excitement she cried out; I being scared, swallowed quickly the mouthful I had. I do not know what happened after that but I presume my sister did not escape a spanking. I fail to see yet how that can account for my fatness; but this is the story that they all told to me.

In Africa, it is the custom among mothers, especially those who live in the villages, to take their babies out-of-doors on the eighth day after their arrival. This perhaps has some reference to the old Jewish custom that we read about in the Bible, although it is done in an entirely different way. The ceremony is conducted in this way; in the morning of the 8th day, the relatives and friends will gather rather early at the home of his family; then after a short devotional exercise a prominent member of the family will take the baby into her arms and lead the way out into the street where four or five roads meet. The rest of the company will gather around her while she says to the child, pointing to each at a time—this road leads to the church where some day you will go. This next road leads to the school house where you must get instruction. This other road leads to the creek where you will go for water, or to fish or swim. And to the woods where you will get your kindling or hunt birds and wild flowers, this is the road to follow. It is believed that the road the baby smiles at when it is shown to him will be the one he'll be most fond of. I think that is the reason why I am especially fond of the creek; I must have smiled when that road was pointed out to me.

Boyhood Days.

Several years of my infancy passed by without any special significance. I played and talked and walked like the average African boy. When I was old enough to go to school, I was sent to a village school seven miles from Freetown. My only conception of a school teacher or school master, as they were generally known in those days, was that of a man who had full authority to carry a long switch day and night in order to punish rather mercilessly any boy or girl that he wished. It seemed to me that he had an unlimited amount of power, being looked upon as next to the cleverest man in the village—the preacher. I can remember now how we used to dodge him whenever we happened to run across him in the street. Sometimes in the midst of our play someone shouted, "Master" and away we all went disappearing out of

sight. On account of these things school-life became very unpleasant to me; many times I wished I could spend my time in something other than going to school. The American boy or girl of today does not know what a blessed thing it is have one who is loving, kind and gentle as a teacher. Once in a while I run across some "kid" in this country who will call his teacher all kinds of nicknames. I often wonder what he would do if he should have the kind of a teacher I had when in the grades. Although my teacher was apparently harsh and severe, nevertheless, I feel that I owe him much for what I am today.

During the first eight years of my schooling, I lived with my grandmother. She, like most old women of that day, did not believe in punishing a boy at home when he had done wrong, but rather, in taking him to the school and handing him over to the school master. If there was anything that we boys hated at that time, it was being brought to school for punishment; for there we had an open rebuke before the whole school plus a heavy corporal punishment. I always behaved well at home, at least I tried to, in order not to be punished in school. But alas, there came a time when a troop of British soldiers came into our village during the camping season. They pitched their tents far away from any creek or stream and consequently had to travel a good distance to the nearby brook. We, the inhabitants of the village also had to get all our water from the rivers and creeks as there were no water pipes around. This particular morning, three of us boys decided that we were going to show the soldiers some favor. So upon leaving home for the creek we changed our course, went to the camping grounds and helped the soldiers to get water. It was breakfast time in the camp and the soldiers being pleased with our service invited us to breakfast. We took our time to eat well all that was set before us without stopping to think how much time we were consuming. By the time we got to the creek to fill our buckets to take home we found out that we had lost a whole hour of school. We knew then that our "judgement day" had come, and hurried home as fast as we could but only to find that the folks at home were all in readiness to marshal us before the schoolmaster. What followed next I am not going to narrate, but will ask you to use your imagination. But believe me from that day to this, I have not given another occasion to be brought up for punishment before an assembly.

My boyhood days were not without the pranks and experiences common to most boys along the West Coast of Africa. As I mentioned above, I believe when I was taken out on the eighth day following my birth and showed the road that led to the creek I must have smiled. For almost all through my later years, I spent many an hour fishing, swimming, canoeing and doing all kinds of sports in and along the river. I shall not take the time here to make a contrast between fishing in Africa and fishing in America or to compare swimming in Africa with swimming in America. Since I have been here people have asked me quite often, "Can you swim?" I always did smile when answering the question, for swimming is indeed a great sport to me. I can remember yet those happy days on the beach of the Atlantic Ocean when we like most other boys had nothing more to do than to fish, swim, build sand castles, and gather pebbles and sea shells. Of course we had but very few swimming contests and no records were taken; but we knew how well we could swim and trusted in ourselves if by chance we were chased by an unwelcomed sea friend. Besides spending my time in the water I also took delight in roaming in the woods. To chase away the mother bird, to rob her nest, trap the doves, and hunt little animals were among my favorite sports. During the different seasons it was not an uncommon thing for me to hunt wild fruits and flowers. By doing such things my boyhood days have meant so much to me though they were not without their attending joys and sorrows.

Religious Experience.

I have purposely omitted the religious part of my life story, because I feel this is the place that it fits in most nicely in that it forms the climax to this period of my life's history. Although unlike most boys in Africa I had the privilege to be born of Christian parents yet I was not to be compared with any American boy under the same circumstance. My home influences were not any too good; my outside influences were bad enough. As most of my readers may know, Mohammedanism is a great rival to Christianity in Africa today. It has been so for years and years, and while paganism seems to be the African's creed, nevertheless Mohammedanism is not less active. In Christian American the boy who is born in a Christian home has practically nothing to contend with; he receives proper care and nurture at home and in the church. But in Africa that is not so. With the little Christian influences at home, he is exposed to the big unchristian influences outside the home as well as the unchristian influences from over the seas. To make himself a man costs him twice as much effort as is necessary for the ordinary American boy. His opportunities, besides being limited, are not very good.

My memory goes back just now to the different places of worship I have been in, when in my teens, how foreign they were to me and how formality seemed to reign supreme. Nevertheless, I enjoyed being there, I enjoyed the association if not the fellowship. In my humble family, the family altar is highly cherished, morning and evening—especially in the morning—we would gather for our devotional exercise. When I was about to leave for America I shall never forget the small group of people that met in our little home, according to my mother's plans, to pray for me as well as to pray with me. It took me altogether by surprise as I was not looking for it; and amidst my busy life then getting ready for my departure with all the difficulties and uncertainties that it entailed, I was perfectly at ease as those prayers went up on my behalf.

I have noticed in this country that boys especially are very proud of their mothers; in trying to find out the reason I have come to the conclusion that they have the right to be proud. For if there is only one thing that I will never forget, it is the love and gratitude that I owe my mother for her clean Christian life, her willingness to make me what I am now. She is not wealthy and therefore has not money to bequeath me; she is not well educated and can not impart knowledge to me, but she is a real Christian mother and that is what I am proud of.

Religion in the Schools.

In Africa especially along the West Coast the schools are mostly church schools. Morning and afternoon of each school day, devotional exercises are held, at which time the singing of a hymn, reading of scripture followed by short remarks sometimes, and the offering of prayer come in regular order. Beside these, regular Bible and catechism lessons are taught. This is compulsory even to Mohammedan pupils who attend Christian schools. Sunday school was not the place I became acquainted with the fundamental books, chapters, and characters of the Bible. I got all that long ago in the day school. Quite often I had to commit to memory several passages of scripture. I say I had to do it because I knew what it would mean to me if I did not get it just right.

As I have mentioned above the Mohammedan influence is very strong in and around my home town. In fact the whole of Africa, I regret deeply to say, is divided into more Mohammedan territories than Christian. Perhaps the chief reason is the fact that when an African becomes a Mohammedan he has almost nothing to give up. He claims the possession of a religion and still clings to the old tra-

dition of slavery, many wives, and all kinds of fetish. He is taught to pray several times a day looking toward the East each time; but his prayers are all read from memory instead of being said from his heart. On the other hand, to become a Christian he must give up absolutely and practically his belief in fetish, polygamy, and all unchristian customs; he must be loyal and faithful to the church and live a godly life as best he knows how. The children of Mohammedan parents do not have any choice of their own so far as their religion is concerned. They must, sometimes much against their wish, pray to Allah through Mohammed, their prophet and high priest. My object in bringing this picture before my readers is to make them know what it means to an African to become and remain a Christian. For remember, science teaches us that nature itself follows the line of least resistance. I was never a Mohammedan and will never be one, but I do not criticize those who are; I rather sympathize with them and try to win them whenever I can.

My Academy Days.

When I was through with my grade school work it became a question as to what high school I should attend. Right in Freetown there were several high schools owned and manned by different Christian denominations. After careful study my mother decided to send me to Albert Academy which was and is still ranked among the leading high schools in Freetown. She made all the preparations almost unknown to me and it was one morning in January that we walked up to the school building together. After a seemingly long walk we reached Albert Academy. That was my second trip to that school. The first time I was there was the opening day of the new school building when people from all over the city and places near in the country came to see that imposing brick building. That memorable visit left a desire in me to become an Albert Academy student some day. As I sat and listened to the speeches I was thrilled through and through and could gaze around only once in a while. This second visit was still more memorable; for I could see just at a sweeping glance the very seat I took the day I was there for the first time. More than that, these very seats were occupied by boys of my size and over, which brought to me the thought that I too had a place among them. I was not given the privilege of visiting the class-rooms, for my mother and I were soon taken to the Principal's office. There we had explained to us everything about the curriculum and before I could realize it fully I had been registered as a student.

That day was the beginning of my career in Albert Academy. During the next two years I was a day pupil. I went back and forth to school every school-day in those years. I played like most of the boys did—climbed the trees, swam in the pool, tracked in the woods, trapped the birds and did ever so many other things. At the close of those two years I supposed that my career as a student had terminated. My father had died when I was but five years of age and my mother had eight of us to care for. As I had a younger brother and a sister I felt I ought to give place to them as we could not all be in high school at the same time. I was making all preparations to find a job as soon as possible so that I might be able to help the family in my own small way. As I was doing this, it seems to me now that Providence was working another plan for me. Our school year in Albert Academy is divided into four terms of ten weeks, each coming in consecutive order as the quarters of the year. Our longest vacation always comes at Christmas time, when all schools practically are closed for four or more weeks; that is the time of the year that most students as a rule end their school career. According to my plans I was to leave that December. But what happened? The Rev. E. M. Hursh,

who was acting Principal then, paid a most unexpected call at our home while I was away. He talked over with my mother about my becoming a mission student—that is, I was to receive support from the mission while in school and after my graduation I was to become a worker in the mission field. Mother did not take a long time to decide as she had always wished that one of her four boys should be enlisted for full time Christian service. She then promised Mr. Hursh to take me along to see him the next day. I came home that evening all happy and smiling as usual; and as it was our family custom I went in to give mother my salutation. She welcomed me and then said Mr. Hursh had been there and wanted to see us both the next morning. My countenance changed immediately; I began to wonder what evil I had done. The more I tried to figure this out the harder it became. Supper time came and I had no appetite. I retired to bed in great bewilderment. Morning came and soon after breakfast we left for the Academy. All the way I did not feel like carrying on any conversation although mother spoke to me several times. I was serious and trying to think out what argument I would bring up to defend myself. Finally we reached the school and went up to the Principal's office. After we had been nicely greeted and comfortably seated, some conversation began. A little while afterward Mr. Hursh turned to me and said, "How would you like to become a life-work recruit?" The question so astounded me that up to this day I cannot recall exactly what my reply was, but I am positively sure it was in the affirmative, for if that was not so, I would not have been in America today.

All this happened during the Christmas recess and in the beginning of the next school year I was prepared to enter Albert Academy as a full boarding student under the care of the mission. I looked forward to my departure from home with a feeling mingled with joy and sorrow; joy, in that a fuller and larger scope in life has been opened to me, sorrow, because, as you all know, it is hard to say "good-bye" at home. The day came at last and with a brave heart I bade them all "adieu."

My new life as a boarder brought me many kinds of experiences; experiences bought as well as experiences gained. I shall not wipe out of my memory the intimate relations formed with my chums during those three years I spent there; the annual events of a boarder's life, and the fellowship one with another.

Prominent among the religious activities in Albert Academy is the "Itinerants' League." This is an organization for all students who have already decided or who have interest in full time Christian service. We divide ourselves into groups and go out regularly every Sunday to teach the Bible to the natives in the vernacular. This was very enjoyable, for we made practical our purpose to become volunteers to our own people.

Apart from my religious growth in the Academy, I came in contact with great men and books from and about America. I used to admire particularly the Rev. A. T. Sumner, a graduate of Lebanon Valley College, who was one of my teachers. He told us time and again about boys working their way through college in America, and never left out how he himself succeeded in making his way through college about twenty years ago. As I listened to those real stories I always thought I too would make the venture some day.

The years passed by and I became a graduate after having completed the prescribed course of study. There was no question then as to what I should do for I was expecting an appointment in the next Annual Conference which was to be convened a few weeks later. The time came, Conference met and appointed me a teacher at Rotifunk. Many people said afterwards, but I did not know it then, that when I first entered Rotifunk I looked more like a pupil than a teacher. I felt

rather dignified to assume such a position with a salary of \$10.00 a month and did not seem to know what people were thinking of me.

My years at Rotifunk were not without reminiscences of the past and bright prospects of the future. I enjoyed my work and learned to like better the boys and girls I came in contact with day after day. I not only sympathized with them but was also anxious to help them.

The duties of a teacher in the out-stations are many and various, especially at Rotifunk where the mission possesses a boys' home, and a dispensary besides the school and church. Apart from my regular school duties, I helped in the dispensary. It was there that I got the faintest idea of the untold physical suffering of humanity, the diseases that one is exposed to, and the need of teaching the lesson of "prevention" rather than "cure." As I helped around the home, the school, and in the community at large I made many friends and acquaintances. I also enjoyed the company of the missionaries with whom I had to labor. I can recall to mind just now the constant fellowship and companionship I had with the Rev. J. F. Musselman who was head of the station for a good while. He was very fond of chickens and took much delight in raising them. It was through him I developed the liking for raising chickens. Many times he would pick up a hen or rooster and give me valuable information about its growth and other development and if that particular chicken happened to die, he was ready to tell me why. As a gardener he was unsurpassed by any other in the whole town. He raised both native and foreign crops. As I look back to those days I feel I owe him something for what I now know concerning chickens and gardens. To name my other friends among the missionaries will mean to name the whole list of them for I knew almost every one of them.

After spending a few years at Rotifunk I was transferred to Albert Academy to continue my work as teacher. I came back to the old school with the full realization of what my school days there had meant to me. Although not so long ago I had sat in those very seats as a pupil and received instruction, now I was in a different capacity. Many of the faces were new to me, as those with whom I had studied and played together had taken their places in the wide, wide world. Notwithstanding this apparently new environment, I pretty soon became acquainted and tried to be useful.

Going to College.

But back in those days at Rotifunk I had cherished the idea of acquiring a collegiate training; I saw how much better I could help if I was more efficient and what it would mean to me all the rest of my life if I could only make this big sacrifice once. Again and again this thought came to me, with greater force each time until I became convinced that that was God's plan for me. I prayed over the matter times without number believing that some day the way would be opened. And this was how it all happened. One morning, as I was going through the assembly hall of Albert Academy my eye glanced upon a little book lying on one of the desks on which was written, "Otterbein College Bulletin." I picked it up immediately and started to read. Previous to that time I knew very little about Otterbein, but by the time I got halfway through I had received some valuable and interesting information. I noticed on one page particularly that all worthy and ambitious students could work their way through college. I said to myself "That means me." So I sat down right there and then, wrote President W. G. Clippinger a letter asking him to give me the chance of working my way through college. It was about two months afterward that the reply came from him, saying that he needed some recommendation as he did not know me personally. Through the kindness of missionaries on the field as well as missionaries on fur-

lough I was highly recommended and before another month had fully passed I received a second letter from President Clippinger saying, "Otterbein College is now open for you to enter as a student." What joy this second letter brought me I am unable to express here; anyone who has had like experience can imagine it better than I can describe it. But, that was not all. My next great difficulty was to reach Otterbein. First of all there was my mother to be convinced that I could get along all alone some thousands of miles away from home. Next, where was I to get the passage money? All these things came to a settlement when I said to myself, "Sink or swim, I am going to make it." There was only one thing left for me to do about my passage and that was to work my way across. After every arrangement had been made, I secured a job as one of the stewards on board a freighter which was leaving for New York. On July 13, 1920, our boat sailed out of Freetown Harbor. I can remember yet what a bright day it was and as we went gradually out of sight of land, how often I ran up on deck in order that I might have just the last peep at my beautiful home-land. For full nineteen days we sailed on the Atlantic Ocean without being able to see anything but the sky above us, the horizon around us, and occasionally a passing ship. On the morning of the 20th day we landed in Brooklyn, New York. It is not too much to say that everyone of us was glad when the journey came to a close. For, besides the three-day storm at sea which caused so much excitement and fear, we came pretty near running out of food. Worst of all to me the company of the crew on board was not very pleasant; sometimes I would much rather have stayed in my cabin when my day's work was done than to have joined the company of men on deck. The nature of my work was not very hard, but the experiences it brought were trying. The chief steward, when under the influence of whisky (and that he was very often), would do things and say words that I would not dare to mention here. Today I rejoice that such experiences only come once in a life-time.

When our boat landed in Brooklyn, New York, I was instructed by the immigrant officer to go to Ellis Island, where I was to take my physical as well as my intellectual test. That was the first place where I caught a glimpse of the multitudes and races of this world. Here and there were great throngs of people of both sexes, all sizes and about all colors, mingling together. It is rather sad to tell how some were disappointed in that they could not pass their efficiency test and had to be ordered back home. I remember full well, when one of the officials signed my papers, he said to me, "You are one step nearer the Statue of Liberty." Another official who was a doctor said to me, "Where are you going?" "To Otterbein College" I answered. "Oh! I think I have heard about that school," he continued. I felt myself justified right there and then for having chosen Otterbein, a school that is known far and wide.

On my way to Westerville, Ohio, I rode on the "Pennsylvania Line." It was an over-night trip and I was happy when it came to an end. Among the experiences that came to me during that trip was the one which startled me off my seat and made me watch for the door of the coach thinking that the world was coming to an end. This was a terrible noise caused by another train which ran past us. I did not know there was a double track and consequently I was not expecting another train. In Africa the trains run only one at a time.

College Life.

Since I came to Westerville on the 10th of August, 1920, I have been making my home here. I have made many friends and acquaintances, people whom I shall never forget. I remember a few days after I landed at Westerville, Dr. E. E. Burtner, pastor of our First

United Brethren Church, asked me what was one of the things that impressed me most in America. I told him it was the way the children played in the streets. I do not know how, but from the very time we landed in Brooklyn, I noticed that strongly. I think I can account for the fact now that the children in this country are called "kids." You know "kids" means young goats, and young goats as a rule like to run, and skip, and frisk all the time; so they deserve well their name.

As I take a retrospect of my last three years in college, I hardly know what to say, or rather what not to say. Those who have been to college and have realized the worth of collegiate training will sympathize with me when I say that words fail me at such a time. For, I can hardly believe I am about seven thousand miles away from home when I stop to think what my coming here has already meant to me. I rejoice today that I ever did take upon myself to come to college; and as I look into the future just now, I can see that my success in life depends largely on what use I make of my present opportunities and privileges.

To me college life means more than I can express; it means four years of preparation for a life-time of service; a little sacrifice, a little unpleasantness for a life of untold blessing to those who are near and dear to my heart. As I now stand nearly through my college career and look back I can truly say, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped me." On the other hand as I look forward, I become rather anxious to lift high the veil which hides the future from my eyes and see myself away out in Africa convincing people of the horrors of heathenism and the faithlessness of Mohammedanism. As the years come and go, I place myself unreservedly in the hand of Him who has led me all the way and who will continue to lead me moment by moment. I love Him, I trust Him, I believe in Him, therefore I am convinced that if I live for self, I live in vain; but if I live for others I shall live again.



Albert Academy, Freetown, West Africa

Otterbein
College
Westerville,
Ohio

